



Breast cancer. No one wants it, and yet nearly everyone knows someone who's had it. In fact, every three minutes a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer. And although it is far more common among women, it can also occur in men. As commonplace as this disease seems to be, knowledge is still power ; the more you know about breast cancer, the better able you are to reduce your risk of developing it, or survive it if you do develop it. Even if you think you've heard it all before, take a few moments to refresh your memory on the basics of breast cancer.

Breast cancer occurs when cells inside the breast tissue begin to grow abnormally or out of control. In its early stages, breast cancer is usually not painful. In fact, there may be no symptoms at all when it first develops. But as the cancer grows, there are certain changes that women should watch for.

- A lump or thickening in or near the breast or in the underarm area.
- A change in the size or shape of the breast.
- Nipple discharge or tenderness.
- The nipple pulled back or inverted into the breast.
- Ridges or pitting of the breast.
- A change in the way the skin of the breast, areola, or nipple looks or feels (such as warm, swollen, red, or scaly).

Breast Cancer Awareness Month – October 2009

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If you have any of these symptoms, you need to see your doctor. They are usually not cancer, but it's still important to check with your doctor to make sure any problems get diagnosed and treated as early as possible. Aside from your annual physical, conducting routine breast self-exams and getting a regular mammogram, there are simple things you can do to significantly reduce your risk for breast cancer.

First, know your family health history. If you have a family history of breast cancer, this puts you in a higher risk category. By simply knowing your family history, you can take other important steps to reduce your risk.

Second, get active. Believe it or not, a woman who exercises four hours per week reduces her risk of breast cancer. According to the National Breast Cancer Foundation, exercise pumps up the immune system and cuts the level of estrogen.

Third, eat better. According to recent research, a high-fat diet can increase the risk of breast cancer. Remember, a healthy diet includes at least 5-9 servings of fruits and vegetables each and every day.

And fourth, quit smoking. While the relationship of breast cancer to smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke are still under study, the prudent recommendation is to stop smoking – once and for all. Although not meant to be a comprehensive list, these four steps can significantly reduce your risk for breast cancer.

Source: National Cancer Institute